



CEBU CITY — Kawasan Falls, one of Cebu's popular tourist destinations in the mountains of Barangay Matutinao in Badian town, will be temporarily closed to give way for the rehabilitation of its surroundings.

Cebu Gov. Gwendolyn Garcia has issued an executive order, as well as an advisory to the public after noticing that illegal structures are sprouting in the area, located 130 kilometers southwest of Cebu City and about a three-hour bus ride.

"Tourists don't come there to buy but to see for themselves the beauty of the falls," Garcia said in Cebuano, adding that the structures in the area are a manifestation of crass commercialism that has no regard for nature and the environment.

At least 44 illegal structures were built at the site and these have affected the falls' scenic view.

In previous meetings, the owners of the cottages and kiosks were given until April 15 to tear down their structures.

However, during the site inspection conducted by Garcia herself last Monday, some structures were still standing.

Tension briefly occurred, as Garcia was involved in a heated argument with one of the affected operators of cottages and kiosks, Wilhemino Saldua, owner of Willy's, who asked the governor to show a court order for the demolition.

Saldua alleged that he has a title, but after a brief confrontation, he walked out of the meeting.

Saldua built a kiosk along the river with concrete floor and bamboo walls.

Like the other illegal structures due for demolition, Saldua's had no business permit from the municipal government.

The other cottage owners and vendors voluntarily tore down their structures to comply with the provincial government's request.

Assistant provincial engineer Eulogio Pelayre said the structures were built way back in the 1970s and improvements were made in recent years.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) will investigate the environmental compliance certificate that was issued to the cottage owners and vendors.

Also, environment officials will verify Saldua's claim of a lot title.

Director Al Orolfo of the DENR's Protected Areas, Wildlife and Coastal Management Services said rivers like Matutinao River, which Kawasan Falls is part of, are a public domain, thus these cannot be titled.

Orolfo suggested to the municipal government of Badian to declare the area a municipal park to give it the power to protect the area.

Orolfo also gave assurance that the DENR will extend technical assistance so the area can meet the qualifications of being a municipal park.

Earlier, the DENR suggested that the Kawasan Falls be declared a protected area.

After the site inspection, the provincial engineering office was tasked to demolish the illegal structures.

Garcia will again visit Kawasan Falls after a week to inspect if the structures are already demolished.

Badian Mayor Robburt Librando said the municipal government has linked up with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to assist the vendors and families displaced at Kawasan Falls who will be enrolled in a basket-weaving course.

Dr. Elias Tecson, chief of the DTI's Business Development Division, said there are sure buyers for the baskets that will be produced.